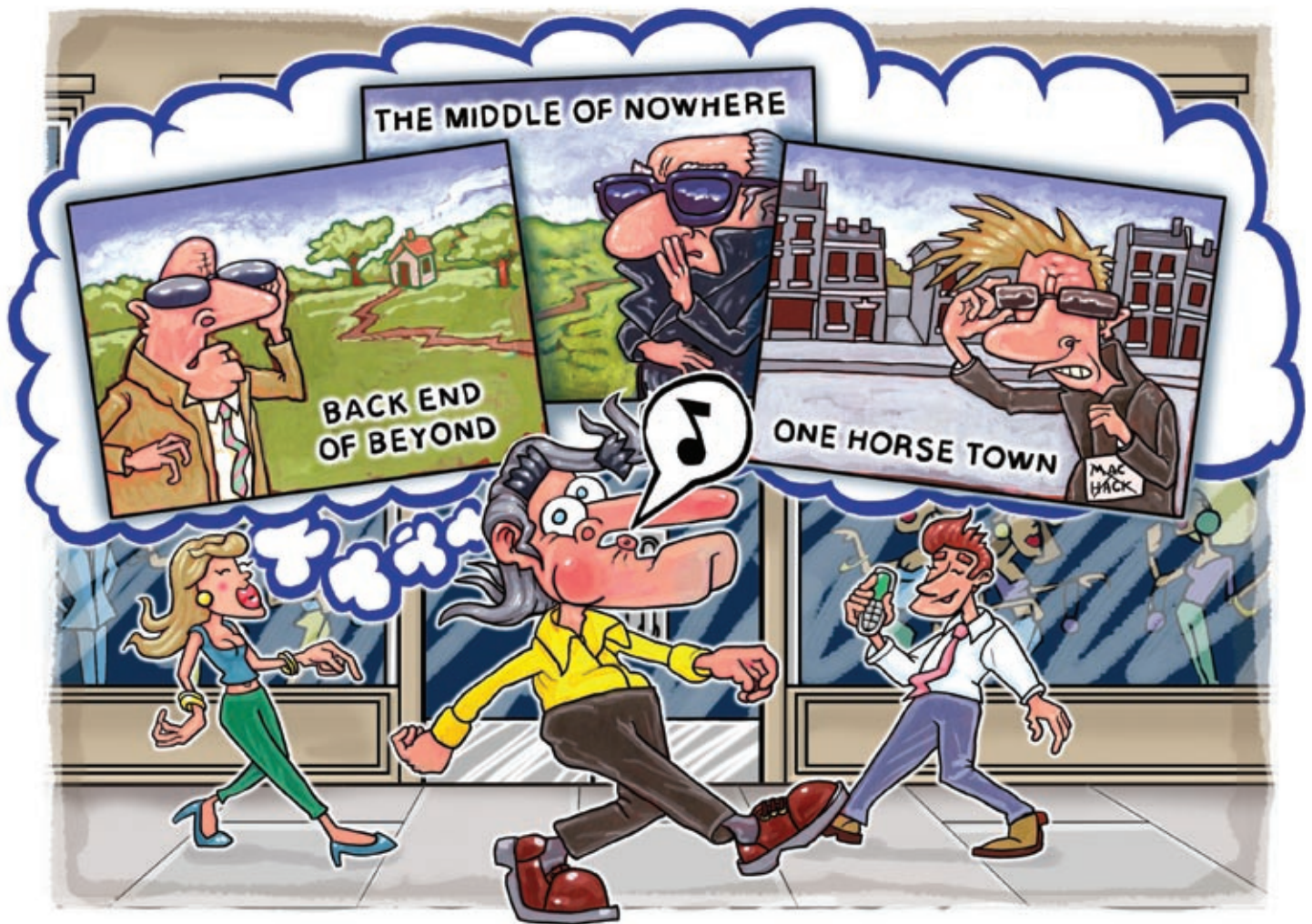




MACBITER

While others hang their heads in shame for failing to predict Apple's switch to Intel chips, MacBiter has nothing to hide. He made no comment in the first place

The profession of IT journalist specialising in the Apple Macintosh – let's call it Mac hackery for short – might seem at first sight to be a glamorous one, but first impressions can be misleading. The high salary, the luxurious lifestyle, the posh cars, the frequent holidays on sun-kissed beaches... these are just some of the goodies that will never come his way. Instead, he will spend his days chewing his nails in an underfurnished garret or suchlike, frantically pounding out bollocks on a word processor so that he can score at least one bottle of Johnnie Walker a day. More than that he cannot reasonably hope for. And there is worse to come.

After all, Mac hacks, like any other kind of IT hacks, are expected to voice opinions. Here, as I've cheerfully

admitted in these very pages on many occasions, is where things can go wrong. Predicting where this or that segment of the IT business will go next is a lottery. The conscientious hack therefore reads assiduously,

then will he decide to pitch in with his own views.

That's how it's done in theory. But at least half the time it turns out the industry sources he consulted were out to lunch, while the informed

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counselling opinions other than his own. He scours the web for news and informed rumour. He weighs the facts as he understands them. And only

opinion was provided by Jade Goody. And the fearless prediction turns out to be a horrible goof. Which is a lot worse for the Industry Commentator

than it would be for you, because the IC is expected to know all about these matters and, if he doesn't, what's the point of him?

HIDDEN DEPTHS

I've no doubt that two-thirds of the registered Mac hacks in the western world are currently on vacation in unfashionable places wearing very dark sunglasses, because sadly this is roughly the proportion of people who got Apple's switch to Intel chips hopelessly wrong. But not *moi*. I am still strolling the boulevards of fashionable Hastings, and I leave my shades in the car. I have nothing to fear, for once. I expressed no opinion on this matter at all, and so my credibility remains intact.

The main reason my hands are clean is because the whole issue blew up very quickly. The rumours began shortly after I filed my last column, and came to fruition before this one; but not before the aforementioned several hundred false prophets had blown their cool by protesting that such a thing could never happen. Rumours that Steve Jobs had been having close talks with Intel could easily be explained by the fact that Jobs wanted to 'put pressure' on IBM



(the story so far: IBM has consistently failed to produce faster G5 chips for Macs or cooler G5s for Mac laptops). The talks were about WiFi or special chips for iPods. The talks were in fact about anything except what they were most likely to be about: the migration of the Mac from IBM's PowerPC chip family to Intel, the world's biggest and most powerful semiconductor manufacturer.

Journalists found it hard to believe that once again Apple would put its customers and developers through the nightmare of a major platform switch. The first of these switches was in the early 1990s, when Apple migrated from the Motorola 680X0 family – which had served it since its launch in 1984 – to the all-RISC PowerPC chip, developed mainly by IBM but manufactured by Motorola. The second was when it dumped OS 9 and moved the operating system to the UNIX-based OS X. Both migrations were seen as essential by Apple at the time and yet each move cost the company a loss of market share. The way these people saw it, Apple didn't have a third foot in which to shoot itself.

NO NEED FOR SPEED

It's not even necessary, they argue, because the speed argument – the Gig Factor – is largely irrelevant. In any case, if PowerPC chips are so slow, why are the new generation of games consoles all using them?

Nah, they said. It isn't going to happen, it's some game Steve Jobs is playing. And then, at the Worldwide Developers Conference in San Francisco, Steve Jobs blew them and their credibility out of the water by admitting it was all true.

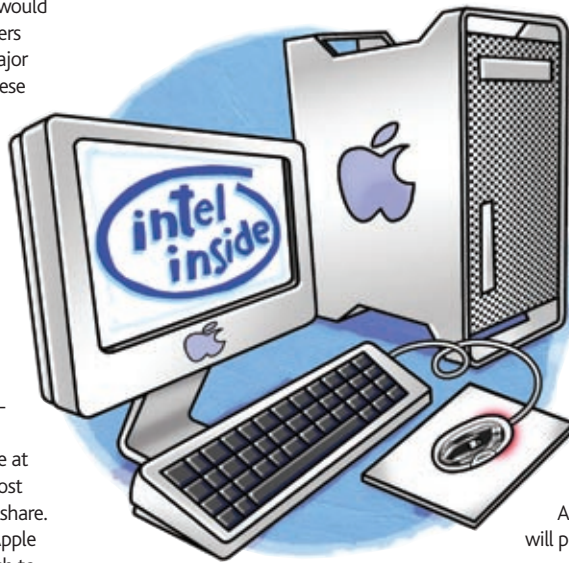
'Admitting' hardly states it. The man was as bullish as he's ever been, decrying all hopes for a continuation with IBM, comparing its product unfavourably with Intel's and lamenting the effete nature of its 'road map'. It was even claimed afterwards that, in the best traditions of the bum being given the rush, IBM only discovered the facts from news reports, though it had already become suspicious by Jobs' refusal to return calls. The Black Spot was apparently delivered to Big Blue at 3pm on Friday 4th June.

Goodbye, IBM. Seriously.

PRINCESS DI-VERSION

Do you remember the media brouhaha at the time of the death of Di? The frantic zeroing-in on the drunk driver of the Mercedes. The pumped-

up anger at the Royal Family's apparent lack of gravitas and proper respect. All got up – in best Slime Street tradition – to divert attention from the fact that Di was actually pursued to her death by paparazzi employed by these same newspapers. This is what is called creating a diversion. And it worked. The public being the collective moron it is, it allowed its sheep-like attention to be skewed off-focus, with the result that



seamless megatransparent cache thingy that does you-know-what to all graphics applications was all bollocks. Mendacious bollocks. But hey! This is the IT biz, you know?

An even more off-the-wall interpretation of events comes from respected US IT commentator Robert Cringely, who says: "This isn't a story about Intel gaining another three per cent market share at the expense of IBM – it is about Intel taking back control of the desktop from Microsoft." Huh? As Cringely sees it, Intel hates Microsoft, not least because Redmond consistently fails to come up with product ideas that actually drive Intel's R&D; in other words, devices and applications that demand ever greater power. And when Microsoft did have one with Xbox, it went elsewhere.

So the Master Plan is actually not Apple's at all, but Intel's. It will proceed to buy Apple

Hard to believe that once again Apple would put its customers through a major platform switch. It didn't have a third foot in which to shoot itself

the Red Tops got away with what was in effect the culpable homicide of an international icon.

A minor echo of this is being replayed in the web pages of Mac cognoscenti, with those hacks who were heavily prominent in rubbishing the Intel story desperately competing with each other to come back on to the front foot by 'expertly analysing' Jobs' motives in pursuing what only recently they were calling an idiotic idea. Since Jobs is not an idiot, at least not usually, they have to assume that he has a Master Plan. Working out what it might be, and putting each other down in the process, is proving mightily rewarding for the offstage connoisseur of embarrassment.

Some hacks have taken note – not before time – of the fact that when Apple moved to OS X, and thereby UNIXised it, it was even then, whether the company knew it or not, keeping open the possibility of an eventual switch to Intel or AMD. This is the Master Plan, they now claim. He was going to do it all the time. In which case, they are obliged to admit, the last three years or so of hype for the G5 and its 64-bit bus and its

outright – in Cringely's hunch – and then use the Mac OS to lever away at Microsoft's dominance, largely by making it open source. (Double 'huh?') This apparently would also put paid to AMD.

And how much would this purchase cost Intel, even supposing Jobs was willing to sell outright? Not much, says Cringely, and it could be done without any cash changing hands, since the stock options would go through the roof once the punters heard of the merger/takeover.

Is that a dog I hear barking?

INTEL INSIDE – EVENTUALLY

Nevertheless it is a done deal and there are problems in store. Many have expressed surprise, not only at the deal, but also at the timing of its announcement. The earliest Intel Macs (probably PowerBooks) will not appear until this time next year, and the first desktop machines not before 2007. This is a very long time to wait in today's thrusting marketplace, especially considering that, from this moment on, all G4 and G5-fitted Macs have the kiss of death on them. So it seems that for at least a year

Apple is going to lose still more market share.

And how about the transition itself? What will an AppTel OS X look like? Above all, will there be a way of running Windows programs, particularly games, as so many commentators seem to favour? How will Apple persuade developers to rewrite all their code (again), this time in a form known as Universal Binary so that it will run on all platforms?

On the up side, Microsoft has already expressed support for the move, and the Man from Adobe was positively ebullient at the news, lamenting only that it hadn't happened earlier. All parties made light of the recoding issue, since apparently large chunks of code will run unmodified, while for the rest there's QuickTransit, a licence-only package that delivers acceptable Universal Binary versions of just about anything provided you stump up a hefty fee. QuarkXPress, still a key Mac application, may be a little late joining the party, since it took about four years to migrate from OS 9 to OS X, and there are other factors that may degrade the smoothness of the migration. I don't know what these are right now – you won't catch me that easily – but based on past experience they'll show up right enough. Meanwhile, all those rumours you've heard about Apple running OS X smoothly on X86 platforms in the lab turn out to be true.

INTERIOR MOTIVES

So is the move explained by (a) the wish to adopt a superior chip technology; (b) the wish to stuff IBM in revenge for failing to come up with a superior chip technology and, when it did, selling it to others first; or (c) the wish to stuff Microsoft by taking control, in partnership with Intel, of the entire personal computer shebang, thereby leading to world domination? Or is the whole thing down to Steve Jobs having what the rest of us would call a Senior Moment?

One thing's for sure, Intel is happy. In an interview given before the deal was announced, Intel VP Anand Chandrasekher said, "We always talk to Apple. Apple is a design win that we've coveted for 20 years and we continue to covet it as a design win. We will never give up on Apple." Nor did they.

The Mac. With Intel Inside (chime). Coming your way soon. But not that soon. **CS**

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